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October 16, 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR

THE SECRETARY OF STATE

The President asked that I send you a copy of this paper which was received in this office. He would appreciate your comments on it by November 6.

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Henry A. Kissinger

Attachment

This same memo sent to: The Secretary of Defense
The Attorney General

HAK:TL:lds:10/16/69

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October 22, 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR

The Director of Central Intelligence

Per our conversation attached is the paper,
"The Modern World, A Single 'Strategic
Theater'".

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Henry A. Kissinger

Attachment

HAK:JTH:feg:10/21/69

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

October 14, 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR

HENRY KISSINGER

This is to return your memorandum to the President providing a strategic overview of world relations.

Please note that the President wants you to send this, together with a note from the President, to Secretary Laird, Secretary Rogers and Attorney General Mitchell. They should be asked to comment on it and to have their comments to the President within a two-week period, due date November 6.


KEN COLE

Attachment


MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger 

SUBJECT: A Strategic Overview

Attached is a memorandum written by an acquaintance of mine which provides a rather comprehensive assessment of the United States' position in the world. Although I do not agree with its every last word, it does define the problem we face -- the generally deteriorating strategic position of the United States during the past decade.

Many analysts have written about the problems faced by the Communists. But I do not believe that the world situation, as viewed from Moscow, provides great cause for Communist pessimism.

Andrei Zhdanov's "two-camp" speech in September 1947 referred only to Bulgaria, Poland and Romania as relatively secure Communist states and allies. He saw no real possibility in the Middle East and no hope in Latin America. He considered China to be imperialist. But Zhdanov's pessimistic outlook has not been justified by subsequent events -- certainly during the last decade.

- In the Middle East, Russian influence is spreading and moderate Arab governments are under increasing pressure.
- In Latin America, the potential for guerrilla warfare grows, and the outlook for future Nasser-type (if not Communist), anti-American governments improves.
- In Europe, NATO is in a state of malaise, accentuated by our shifting policies over the last 10 years. Europeans are increasingly concerned about isolationist currents within the U. S. (particularly within the liberal community).

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-- In Asia, as you saw on your trip, leaders are concerned about the future U.S. role there.

You inherited this legacy of the past decade. The lesson one can draw from it is not that we can fight this trend on every issue. But foreign policy depends on an accumulation of nuances, and no opponent of ours can have much reason to believe that we will stick to our position on the issues which divide us. When Hanoi compares our negotiating position on Vietnam now with that of 18 months ago, it must conclude that it can achieve its goals simply by waiting. Moscow must reach the same conclusion.

These are dangerous conclusions for an enemy to draw, and I believe that we therefore face the prospect of major confrontations.

Hence, my concern about the gravity of the situation, of which I thought I should let you know.

Attachment

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September 29, 1969

The Modern World, A Single "Strategic Theater"

Section A

1. It is one of the truisms of our time that because of the sensational development of communications and transportation, the globe has shrunk with distances between formerly far-away countries having been reduced to mere hours of flight time. We all pay continuous lip service to the axiom that the hallmark, today, of relations among States, even among continents, is interdependence rather than independence. But while every political writer and speaker belabors this point ad nauseam, we actually deal with the Mideast, Latin America, the Atlantic Region, Eastern Europe, NE Asia, and SE Asia as if we were still living in the WW-II era when it was realistic and feasible to speak of a European, an India-Burma-China, a Pacific "Strategic Theater" as essentially separate and autonomous.
2. In theory, people may understand the phenomenon of interdependence rather well and be quite aware of the fact that the whole globe, by now, has become a single strategic theater. In practice, however, near-unavoidable bureaucratic compartmentalization has led to specialization among experts and decision-makers: Those who are knowledgeable regarding the strategically more and more important Trucial Oman, know little or nothing about Canada, and those who are experts on Berlin have no eyes for, or interest in, the issue of Okinawa. The man who daily struggles with the agonizing problem of Vietnam can hardly be expected to pay special attention to the latest coup in Libya, and the person concerned with US aid to Latin America has little time or inclination to consider recent political developments in Czechoslovakia.
3. Since, by chance, it has become my speciality to be a generalist, let me draw for you a sketch of how seemingly isolated developments in specific areas are deeply interconnected in fact, how the single stones of the mosaic actually form a clearly recognizable overall tableau.

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Section B

I

1. It might be helpful to start out with a remarkable, largely unnoticed, passage in Senator Mansfield's Report to the President, on his recent Pacific tour. Having stated that the leaders of the Asian countries visited by him "agree" that the role of the US in Asian affairs should shrink, the Senator remarked that there was also "some uneasiness" among those leaders "that the pendulum will swing too far from [US] over-involvement to non-involvement." Mansfield is not a "pessimist," because -- as you may remember -- he had on the very eve of the invasion of Czechoslovakia reported to President Johnson that, on the basis of his analysis of the situation in East Europe, he considered a reduction of US forces in Germany not only appropriate but even desirable. Actually, the Senator's wording -- "some uneasiness" in non-Communist Asia about the US moving toward a stance of non-involvement -- constitutes a "diplomatic" understatement which barely hints at, but does not really reflect at all, the overwhelming fear of such countries as S. Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore -- and even Indonesia, the Philippines and Australia -- to have to face potential future aggressors essentially with their own military forces.

2. Your country specialists will tell you, if you ask them, that the Indonesian leaders -- despite the size and relative geographic protectedness of their island nation -- have informed us of a need for the US to "stay" for at least 3 more years in Vietnam, so that they might peacefully consolidate their country without fear of Communist direct or indirect aggression.

3. It also deserves to be noted that GEN Romulo -- unwaveringly pro-US and anti-Communist -- nevertheless remarked in a public speech, some time ago, when he took over the position of Foreign Minister at Manila, that in view of the impossibility to rely henceforth on US protection it would be necessary to "adjust" Philippine Foreign Policy. He remarked, in this connection, that, as of that day, Philippine Foreign Office references to China would no longer be to the "Chinese Mainland" but to the Peoples Republic of China, the country's official designation adopted by the Mao regime. In an interview given by Romulo at the UN in N. Y. he expressed a wish

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(see NY Times of September 22, 1969) "that the UN, in its peace-keeping efforts, would consider [General] MacArthur's suggestion that borders threatened by guerrilla infiltration or possible enemy invasion be sealed off with a belt of radioactive materials." The suggestion of so strong, and innately unpopular, a measure by a SE Asian Foreign Minister does reveal more than mere "uneasiness" in the face of coming dangers.

4. The Prime Minister of Singapore, Mr. Lee, who proudly calls himself an Asian Socialist, shocked the anti-Vietnam War Swedish Social Democrats last year, when he declared in an address to that party's annual Congress, that the US was fighting in Vietnam for the independence of Singapore and that this independence was predicated on US willingness to continue the fight.

5. You also remember that Sihanouk of Cambodia -- certainly not a friend and even less a tool of the US -- has explained again and again over many years that he had no choice but to accommodate to China the powerful, because one day, regardless of US protestations to the contrary, Washington would move its forces out of SE Asia and he, as a convinced Cambodian nationalist, deemed it his task to establish such relations with the Communist victors of tomorrow that, at least, the Communist takeover would be "peaceful." In a very dramatic, typically Sihanoukian letter to the editors of NYT the Cambodian Chief of State asked his US readers not to consider him naive regarding Communist intentions. I know very well, he wrote, that, although they [Communists] are friendly to me now, "they will say 'Sihanouk down on your knees,' once they are victorious and oust me without ceremony." I do not have to point out to you that, by now, the Cambodians are actually trying to cooperate, tacitly and secretly, with the hated S. Vietnamese in a not very successful attempt to prevent expansion of de facto Communist control over still further areas of their small country.

6. You are also, I believe, fully aware of what Souvanna Phouma of Laos, the leaders of Thailand and those of Malaysia -- to say nothing of Chiang Kai-shek in Taiwan -- tell us in confidence as regards their true feelings; i. e., naked fear, concerning a US military withdrawal from SE Asia.

II

1. The preceding paragraphs have been devoted to SE Asia not only because -- by chance, or due to some inherent geopolitical necessity --

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that region of the world happens to be at the moment our most obviously active area of preoccupation, but also because, for that very reason, it must be these days the center of your own attention and deepest worries. The world, too, focuses its attention on Vietnam, as an indicator of the direction in which US policy and strategy in general are likely to move. You know more, of course, about US future plans and intentions than anyone else, except the President of the US and his Secretary of State, but I venture the assertion that any objective analyst -- be he in Peking or Bonn, Moscow or Paris, Ottawa or Cairo -- simply cannot help reaching the conclusion that, so far, all the indicators point in one direction only: an ultimate pull-out, a radical reduction of military commitments, a withdrawal of US military power not simply in hotly contested Vietnam but on a worldwide scale.

2. It can hardly be questioned by now that we are on the verge of restoring the Ryukyus, our great stronghold in the NE Asia region, to Japan. And even such bases as we may retain on those islands will be, more likely than not, under the same restrictive regime now applying to our troops and military installations in the Japanese homeland (in accordance with the US/Japan Status of Forces Agreement). That South Korea -- already shaken and frightened by the meek US reaction to the capture of the "Pueblo" and to the shooting down of our EC-121 -- is deeply worried by this development is well known and more than natural, especially since Seoul is afraid, not entirely without justification, that in the "post-Vietnam" period we might thin out, or even reduce greatly, the US forces now stationed in that country. Less well known is the fact that the Japanese themselves -- although Tokyo, for obvious reasons, cannot publicly admit it -- feel less well protected with the US military strength on Okinawa diminished or newly restricted. It is generally, and somewhat superficially, assumed that this heightened sense of insecurity may have the salutary effect of spurring Japan into making a greater defense effort of its own. But one must ask, whether it would really be in the US interest, if the Japanese followed this line of thought to its logical conclusion; i. e., to the establishment of a purely Japanese nuclear weapons arsenal. Moreover, the leftist opposition, and pacifism in general, are sufficiently powerful within Japan to create such internal upheaval, if the government were actually to embark on any large-scale rearmament, that there would be a lengthy period of instability and weakness in the country, before it could actually become militarily more self-reliant. In the meantime Japan could hardly fail to seek an accommodation with Red China or the USSR or, "ideally," both. In any

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event: The simultaneous US trend to reduce its power position in North as well as in South East Asia, is bound to have a profound effect on the political and strategic thinking and planning of any Asian country which in the ultimate analysis -- willingly or reluctantly -- has to rely on the US as a protective shield against the potential super power: China. New Delhi, for example, cannot very well assume that the US is prepared to come to its rescue, when it observes Washington's eagerness to move out and away in regard to Pacific areas (such as Indochina and Okinawa/Japan) in which the US has long had an infinitely more pronounced and direct interest than in India. The Indian leaders, in addition, would have to be influenced by the stark military fact that, in the event of a Communist takeover in SE Asia, their country would be outflanked in the East, with a pro-Chinese Pakistan constituting at the same time a (real or imagined) threat in the West.

III

1. As regards the Mid East, it is customary to think, to the exclusion of almost any other consideration, of the Arab/Israeli conflict. No doubt, the present Administration is engaged in a superhuman effort to make the two sides see reason and prevent a "fourth round," but in view of earlier US performances, it must be decidedly difficult for Arabs or Israelis to rely on anything but their own brute strength. A US role as an effective guarantor of any future compromise solution is simply not credible, because of our obvious past and present reluctance (with the one exception of Lebanon in 1958) to back up diplomatic agreements or political friendships with a US military presence.

2. Cynics used to believe that, because of the Jewish vote in the US, Washington would necessarily have to intervene in Israel's favor in any "real emergency." Actually, the historical record proves otherwise. In 1956, we turned against our French and British allies and our Israeli proteges and impelled the latter to evacuate the Sinai peninsula; while in 1967, when Nasser threatened war with remarkable frankness, we tried in every way to dissuade Tel Aviv from reacting to the Egyptian blockade of the Straits of Tiran by non-peaceful means. Israel then started military action on her own, strictly against our wish and will, and won so quickly and overwhelmingly that our readiness to come to its rescue no longer had to be tested. I do not, as you know, consider it an a priori US task and mission to protect Israel, but it so happens that in the eyes of the world that small Western enclave in a non-Western

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environment is considered our "client," and conclusions must be drawn, of needs, everywhere (not only in Moscow and Tel Aviv but in other capitals as well) from the fact that the US is obviously disinclined to support even its own client, if that would mean military involvement.

3. Those Arab regimes, on the other hand, which have struggled to stay relatively pro-West can be even less trustful as regards our active help than the Israelis, since there is no Arab constituency in this country.

4. We have in the past been unable to protect the pro-US royal regime in Iraq. We did not help Saudi Arabia against the Nasser-supported Republican Yemen. We tolerated the establishment of a radically leftist, pro-Peking rather than pro-Moscow, Republic of South Yemen, when the British withdrew from Aden and the Aden Protectorates. We showed no interest, when the moderate government in the Sudan was overthrown by revolutionary radicals; and we obviously will do nothing, if after complete withdrawal of the British from the Persian Gulf area, the present rulers of the various Sheikdoms there should be thrown out by wild-eyed Arab nationalists with Marxist leanings. From the point of view of the moderate Arab leaders it must appear that friendship with the US does not offer protection and does not pay. Only a few weeks ago, King Idris of Libya was ousted by a group of officers leaning toward the Iraqi type of Baathism, one of the most fanatic and anti-Western forms of Arab radicalism. We seemed grateful that, for the time being, the new rulers declared their willingness to tolerate our base at Wheelus and promised not to nationalize the US and other Western oil companies. For King Idris, however, we were either unwilling or unable to do anything. One of the results of the Libyan coup -- apart from the fact that roughly one billion \$ in annual oil revenues has now passed into the hands of avowed Revolutionaries -- is the ominous deterioration of Tunisia's position. Long one of the "most reasonable" and most enlightened among Arab countries, Tunisia, still led by the distinctly pro-Western Bourguiba, suddenly finds herself surrounded by two hostile neighbors: Libya and Algeria. Bourguiba can hardly help feeling that with his moderation he has betted on the wrong horse. Small moderate Lebanon, too -- which in 1958 was still able to call on US military help -- is currently being forced to abandon its traditional policy of neutrality and to tolerate, despite surprisingly courageous counter-efforts by its President Helou, the takeover of its southernmost border areas by Arab Commando groups composed almost exclusively of non-Lebanese. Considering the lack of any physical outside support for Helou, it seems only a question of time, when he, too, will be replaced by regimes of the kind now governing neighboring Syria and Iraq.

a deadly accurate analysis

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5. Under the circumstances, even those Arabs who used to maintain a degree of friendship with the US cannot possibly place great trust in Washington's declarations of amity. It may be a paradox, but must nevertheless be understood, that, precisely because we have shown ourselves so peaceful and patient, so obviously unwilling to intervene with force anywhere or against anyone, it will now be virtually impossible for either Arab or Jew to see in the United States the great power that would actually protect one side against the other and maintain any agreed upon peaceful order by forceful means, should that prove necessary. If a country is so clearly shying away from physical involvement, it is difficult to believe that it will ever permit itself to become so involved.

6. It has widely been assumed that the USSR would restrain the Arabs, as we might restrain the Israelis, out of a fear of a direct US/USSR confrontation. It should be observed, however, that the Soviet interest to exercise such restraining influence is bound to decrease to more or less the same degree to which Moscow's fear of a direct confrontation of the two super powers diminishes. The more the Soviets -- looking at US actions and inactions around the world -- become convinced that the US remains unbendingly resolved to negotiate rather than to confront, the smaller their incentive to restrain their clients; i. e., in the Mid East case, the Arabs.

IV

1. In Latin America, too, the US has demonstrated such extreme unwillingness recently to use "power" that we actually seem to have placed a premium on hotheaded and undesirable ventures by extremists. We have let Ecuador, Peru, and others, arrogate to themselves exclusive fishing rights in a zone of 200 miles from their coastlines, and we have permitted US fishing boats found in those zones to be shelled or brought to port by foreign naval vessels, whence they have been released only against payment of arbitrary "fines." We leaned over backwards not to apply the Hickenlooper Amendment as a sanction against Peru for uncompensated expropriation, by a revolutionary Officers Junta, of hundreds of millions worth of US property. The example was quickly followed by Bolivia where a few days ago, another revolutionary group, likewise led by a general, enacted certain measures, on the very first day of its existence, foreshadowing expropriation of US oil companies in that country.

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2. The Latin temperament is rather volatile by nature and the colossus to the North is not necessarily popular among Latinos. It is dangerous, therefore, and does not promote peaceful developments, if the impression is created that irresponsible -- or even normally quite responsible -- elements, can act wildly and illegally without having to fear any serious reaction on our part. We certainly could not hold the Brazilian government responsible for the recent unprecedented kidnapping of the US Ambassador in full daylight. But it is doubtful, whether our concern for a single diplomat's life, our clearly manifested "hope" that all the kidnappers' demands be fulfilled speedily to save one man, was as humane as it seemed: Since it has become all too clear now that the host country of a US representative can be blackmailed with such surprising ease, it must be feared that there will be further kidnappings of US diplomats in the foreseeable future.

3. It is no longer seriously doubted today that the Balaguer regime in the Dominican Republic with all its deficiencies, is, nevertheless, the best administration that country has ever had since 1865 (when Santo Domingo gained its final independence from Spain). The regime was established after order had been restored in the Republic by US military intervention, which at the time was bitterly criticized by many, even well-meaning people as an act of US "imperialism." No US President, of course, would like to repeat a similar venture. Yet, it is not desirable, in the very interest of peace, to let everybody assume, as appears to be the case today, that the US will no longer intervene anywhere in Latin America at any time.

V

1. When Czechoslovakia was invaded in August 1968, the experts, and large segments of public opinion, found one consolation in the mournful event: It would re-awaken the Western World to the danger from the East and revive the somewhat lethargic NATO. The prediction (which, as you may recall, I contradicted at the time) was wrong. The lasting impression that finally resulted was that of NATO's and the US virtually total non-reaction, except in words, and the capability of brute force (applied in this case by the Soviets) to impose its will.

2. The Germans, as you know only too well from frequent and direct observation, have -- after two World Wars lost, with five totally different regimes following each other within 50 years, and with their

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country still divided -- by no means regained their self-confidence. I transmitted to you the other day a report containing the remarks of a German leader who, upon his return from an official visit to Moscow, while admitting that the Soviets had remained totally rigid and offered absolutely nothing, concluded nevertheless that W. Germany had no choice but to come to terms with Moscow "because," he said, "I have twice recently been in Washington and found there such a trend toward isolationism that I am certain the Americans will sooner or later pull their forces out of Germany." The individual in question may have been objectively wrong, but the fear he expressed is actually shared by virtually all Germans who do have opinions on foreign and world affairs.

3. After having visited Washington and signed the Offset Agreement, Chancellor Kiesinger thought he had obtained a US undertaking that current US force strength in Germany would be fully maintained during, at least, the two years covered by said Agreement. You are far better aware of the fact than I am that his impressions were overoptimistic.

4. It is sometimes asserted that the very threat of US troop reductions would bring about a greater defense effort by the united Europeans themselves. In actual fact, however, Europe -- though united it would be a Great Power -- is not yet united, and Italians, Germans, Frenchmen, Beneluxers, and Scandinavians think of themselves as small, in terms of military strength, and in need of protection by the only super power that happens to exist in the non-Communist world: the US. When big brother even appears to falter, the little brethren will not move forward courageously -- as we seem to think -- but, on the contrary, they will anxiously take several steps backwards.

5. By coincidence, I happened to be in Italy at the end of August, when the fact leaked out that our very small garrison there (in the Verona/Vicenza area with a logistic base at Leghorn) would be cut in half for "economy reasons." The Italians guessed, more or less correctly, that no more than a total of about 1,500 men would be involved. Not a single Italian, whom I heard discuss the matter -- regardless of whether he stood politically on the right, left or center -- accepted that explanation. Everybody assumed, as a matter of course, that this was simply the first installment of a total US military pull-out from Italy.

6. The Canadians, incidentally, encounter the same disbelief throughout Europe, when they adduce economic motives for withdrawing

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roughly one-half of their small European garrison. Unaware of Trudeau's marked sense of independence, many Europeans actually believe that Canada could not very well take such a measure without the, at least tacit, approval of Washington. This, then, leads to the further conclusion that the entire North American continent is beginning to turn inward and intent on ultimately withdrawing all its forces still stationed on foreign soil.

VI

1. You will not expect in this sketch any analysis of the complex issue of US/USSR relations. But one comment deserves to be made in the general context I have chosen: The Soviets are developing some genuine fear of Red China and its intractable leaders. They might, therefore, feel impelled by self-interest to seek a genuine Kremlin/Washington detente, and even make certain concessions to the US as a conceivable future ally, semi-ally or at least friendly "neutral" in a Soviet-Chinese confrontation. The entire Soviet assessment, however, of the weight and value of the United States as a friend or foe, will depend very largely on their considering us either strong-willed or else weak in purpose and resolve. The realists in the Kremlin may now be "taking our measure," and a US yielding, and reluctant to act on all fronts, will appear less interesting and important to them as a factor in the international power struggle than a super power obviously able and willing to use its strength.

good analysis

VII

1. This then is the overall image of the US as a reluctant giant: seeking peace and reconciliation almost feverishly, withdrawing forces not in one but in many parts of the world, tired of using its physical power and firmly resolved to cut existing commitments and keep out, for a very long time to come, of any confrontation that might lead to any military involvement.

Sad but true!

2. This picture appears to be confirmed by a flow of US governmental statements on military budget cuts, temporary suspension of the draft, overall reduction of forces, deactivation of units, and mothballing of naval vessels. Although in reality these various measures, so far, are not earth-shaking in themselves, they do produce the impression of an irreversible trend, of deliberate first steps on the road toward a liquidation of very many long-held power positions, of a systematic retreat into an inner shell. Even though we do not want it, we do appear to friendly as well as hostile observers as intent upon descending from a stage to make room for new actors whom nobody can fully see as yet, but who cannot fail to appear to take the spaces we are leaving empty.

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VIII

1. Anyone with a sense of history will grasp the tragic elements in this situation. The President by training and instinct knows, of course, exactly what is at stake. So do you, a historian and a man with a pronounced sense of power realities. The policy on which we seem embarked is very obviously dictated by a conviction that "public opinion" demands it and that, accordingly, the government is essentially helpless to act otherwise. This pessimism about the public might be unwarranted. Results of a Gallup poll, published in today's NYT (see Annex) indicate that 3 out of 5 persons polled consider US intervention in Vietnam justified. The votes lie not with those professors, students, and other particularly visible and audible protesters, nor with the writers and readers of our few great (or perhaps only big) newspapers.

2. The votes lie with the masses, and I have the truly frightening suspicion that these very masses -- which today do not even care very much about foreign affairs and foreign problems -- will be the first ones to yell for retribution and stampede forward over our bodies, howling that we have betrayed them, when a year or two from now it becomes clear that our well meant policy, allegedly attuned to public opinion, will have led to defeat, and to crises infinitely more terrible than that Vietnam war we have to face now. Lincoln used artillery in the streets of New York against rebellious "copperheads;" about 1100 people were killed in two days as a result. He was considered, however, not only a great man but a great humanitarian, when it turned out, subsequently, that he had been "right." "The people" are not very just, they forgive the victor, but always make scapegoats of their own leaders who are not victorious. The Dolchstosslegende (the propaganda tale of the "stab in the back" of the fighting troops) unfortunately can be invented in any country and at any time.

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